

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8855
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LONDON 20381

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK
SUBJECT: NEC FAILS TO COUNTER LEFTIST PENETRATION

REF: (A) LONDON 20060 (NOTAL) (B) LONDON 18707 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY. IN WHAT MAY PROVE TO HAVE BEEN A WATERSHED MEETING, THE LABOR PARTY'S NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (NEC) DECEMBER 15 VOTED TO CONFIRM THE APPOINTMENT OF TROTSKYITE ANDREW BEVAN AS THE PARTY'S YOUTH ORGANIZER. PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN LED THE FIGHT TO RESCIND THE BEVAN APPOINTMENT ON THE GROUNDS THAT HE IS A MEMBER OF AN INDEPENDENT PARTY, THE SO-CALLED "MILITANT FACTION", AND IS THEREFORE INELIGIBLE FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE PARTY. LET ALONE APPOINTIVE OFFICE. THE NEC'S ENDORSEMENT OF BEVAN, ACCORDINGLY, IS A SERIOUS BLOW TO CALLAGHAN'S PRESTIGE, AS WELL AS A DEFINITE VICTORY FOR THE "MILITANTS" WHO ARE SEEKING TO INCREASE THEIR INFLUENCE. THE NEC ALSO POSTPONED, UNTIL JANUARY, CONSIDERATION OF A REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE MILITANT FACTION WITHIN THE PARTY WHICH RECOMMENDS THAT PROMPT ACTION BE TAKEN TO COMBAT THESE EXTREMIST PENETRATION EFFORTS. HERETOFORE WE HAVE BEEN INCLINED TO DOWNPLAY THE SERIOUSNESS OF

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EXTREME MARXIST PENETRATION OF THE LABOR PARTY. WHILE WE WOULD NOT ARGUE THAT A TROTSKYITE YOUTH ORGANIZER WILL BE ABLE TO SUBVERT THE PARTY, YESTERDAY'S NEC MEETING SUGGESTS THAT THE LEADERSHIP MAY LACK THE WILL TO RESIST PENETRATION OF THE PARTY APPARATUS. THE NEC WILL HAVE ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY TO ACT IN JANUARY, AND IF IT MISSES

THAT CHANCE, CONTAINMENT AND ULTIMATE CLEAN UP IN THE FUTURE WILL BE FAR MORE DIFFICULT. END SUMMARY.

1. THE DECEMBER 15 NEC MEETING PROMISED TO BE IMPORTANT -- BECAUSE THE ISSUE OF EXTREMIST PENETRATION WAS TO BE ADDRESSED DIRECTLY -- AND CONTENTIOUS -- BECAUSE OF THE COMMITTEE'S WELL KNOWN LEFT/RIGHT SPLIT AND THE STRONG EMOTIONAL OVERTONES OF THE PENETRATION ISSUE. THESE EXPECTATIONS WERE FULLY SATISFIED. PRIME MINISTER AND PARTY LEADER CALLAGHAN HAD PUBLICLY CRITICIZED THE NEC'S EARLIER, OFF-HAND DECISION TO APPOINT A LEADING MEMBER OF THE TROTSKYITE "MILITANT" FACTION (REF. A) AS PARTY YOUTH ORGANIZER (ONLY THREE OF ELEVEN MEMBERS OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE VETTING CANDIDATES FOR THE JOB ACTUALLY TURNED UP, AND THEIR RECOMMENDATION THAT BEVAN BE HIRED WAS "NODDED" THROUGH THE NEC WITHOUT DISCUSSION OR VOTE AT THE END OF A LONG, BITTER PRE-CONFERENCE MEETING) AND DEMANDED THAT THE APPOINTMENT BE RESCINDED. CALLAGHAN, NEC MODERATES AND "SWING MEN" SUCH AS PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY RON HAYWARD, WHO HAD ORIGINALLY SUPPORTED BEVAN'S APPOINTMENT, ACTIVELY SOUGHT TO RALLY ANTI-BEVAN FORCES ON THE NEC. THEIR EFFORTS, WE UNDERSTAND, INCLUDED DISCREET APPROACHES TO KEY TRADE UNION LEADERS TO ASK THAT THEY INSTRUCT THEIR UNIONS' NEC DELEGATES TO SUPPORT CALLAGHAN, AS WELL AS ENSURING ALL MODERATES ATTENDED THE MEETING. BEVAN'S ORIGINAL SELECTION, MOREOVER, HAD PROVOKED AN "INDUSTRIAL" PROBLEM. THE 250-MEMBER NATIONAL UNION OF LABOR ORGANIZERS (NULO) OPPOSED THE APPOINTMENT BECAUSE THEY FELT ONE OF THEIR MEMBERS SHOULD HAVE GOT THE JOB AND

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PROMISED TO REFUSE TO WORK WITH BEVAN IF HIS APPOINTMENT WENT THROUGH.

2. ENERGY SECRETARY TONY BENN EMERGED AS BEVAN'S LEADING DEFENDER, ARGUING -- SPECIOUSLY IN OUR VIEW -- THAT THE LABOR PARTY IS DEMOCRATIC AND HAS ALWAYS ALLOWED MARXIST MEMBERS AND BECAUSE BEVAN WAS SELECTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH ESTABLISHED PROCEDURES, HIS APPOINTMENT SHOULD STAND. THE MEDIA, UNDERSTANDABLY, FOUND THE ENTIRE DRAMA WORTHY OF PROMINENT COVERAGE.

3. IN ADDITION TO THE SOMEWHAT SENSATIONAL BEVAN CASE, THE NEC WAS ALSO SCHEDULED TO CONSIDER A FAR MORE SIGNIFICANT ASPECT OF EXTREMIST PENETRATION, A DETAILED REPORT BY NATIONAL ORGANIZER REG UNDERHILL WHICH ESTABLISHED THAT THE TROTSKYITE "MILITANTS" WERE CONDUCTING A WELL-PLANNED "ENTRYIST" CAMPAIGN DESIGNED TO TAKE OVER LABOR PARTY CONSTITUENCY ORGANIZATIONS (REF. A). THIS

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REPORT ALSO RECOMMENDED PROMPT ACTION TO COUNTER THIS
THREAT. UNDERHILL ALSO HOPED TO INTRODUCE ADDITIONAL
INFORMATION HE HAD UNCOVERED INDICATING THAT THE
"MILITANTS" ARE ACTUALLY A STRUCTURED ORGANIZATION WITHIN
THE LABOR PARTY AND THEREFORE DEFINITIONALLY INELIGIBLE
FOR MEMBERSHIP. IN THE EVENT, THE BEVAN AFFAIR CONSUMED
VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE TIME AVAILABLE, TWO AND A HALF
HOURS, AND CONSIDERATION OF UNDERHILL'S REPORT WAS POST-
PONED UNTIL JANUARY.

4. AFTER A LONG, RECRIMINATORY DEBATE, THE NEC VOTED BY
A 15 TO 12 MARGIN TO SUSTAIN BEVAN'S APPOINTMENT.
CALLAGHAN ARGUED FOR RECISION AND WAS SUPPORTED BY DEPUTY
LEADER MICHAEL FOOT. HAYWARD SPOKE AGAINST BEVAN,
ASSERTING THAT HE HAD FAILED TO COMPLY WITH COMMITMENTS
TO DROP HIS "MILITANT" ASSOCIATION, TO KEEP A LOW PUBLIC
PROFILE AND TO SUPPORT PARTY POLICY 100 PERCENT. HAYWARD
WAS JOINED BY THE ONLY OTHER SUB-COMMITTEE MEMBER TO VOTE
FOR BEVAN ORIGINALLY, TRADE UNIONIST HAROLD HICKLING
(GMWU). BENN LED THE OTHER SIDE, REHASHING HIS SPECIOUS
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ARGUMENTS, WHILE LEFT-WING MP FRANK ALLAUN CHARGED THAT FOOT HAD ABANDONED "30 YEARS OF LIBERTARIAN SOCIALISM" BY OPPOSING BEVAN'S APPOINTMENT. LEFT-WING MPS ERIC HEFFER AND JOAN LESTOR OPPOSED RECISION BECAUSE THEY FELT IT COULD SERVE AS A PRECEDENT FOR FUTURE EFFORTS TO "PURGE" LOYAL LEFT-WINGERS (E.G. TRIBUNE GROUP), AS HAD BEEN DONE DURING THE HERBERT MORRISON PERIOD OF LEADERSHIP (IT IS DIFFICULT TO EXAGGERATE THE STRENGTH AND OPERATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE LABOR PARTY'S "INSTITUTIONAL" MEMORY -- EARLIER PURGE VICTIMS INCLUDED STAFFORD CRIPPS, NYE BEVAN AND FOOT).

5. THE ACTUAL VOTING LINE-UP, WHICH WE REGARD AS OF UNUSUAL SIGNIFICANCE BECAUSE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ISSUE, WAS AS FOLLOWS: FOR RECISION - CALLAGHAN, FOOT, DEFENSE SECRETARY FRED MULLEY, EDUCATION SECRETARY SHIRLEY WILLIAMS, MP TOM BRADLEY (TSSA), MP JOHN CARTWRIGHT (COOP), MP JACK ASHLEY, PARTY CHAIRMAN JOHN CHALMERS (BOILERMAKERS UNION), RUSSEL TUCK (NUR), HICKLING, W. JOHN (AUEW) AND BRIAN STANLEY (POEU); AGAINST RECISION - BENN, TREASURER NORMAN ATKINSON, ALLAUN, LESTOR, HEFFER, MP IAN MIKARDO, MP BARBARA CASTLE, MP JUDITH HART, MP LENA JEGAR, MP JOAN MAYNARD, MP RENE SHORT, NICK BRADLEY (YOUTH), ALEX KITSON (TGWU), JOHN FORRESTER (AUEW - TASS) AND E. WILLIAMS (NUM). RIGHT-WING MP WALTER PADLEY WAS ABSENT DUE TO ILLNESS, AND TRADE UNIONIST SAM MCCLUSKIE (NUS) ABSTAINED.

6. THE OUTCOME WAS A JARRING REVERSE FOR CALLAGHAN, AS HE HAD PLACED HIS PRESTIGE FULLY ON THE LINE IN THE EFFORT TO DUMP BEVAN. HIS PUBLIC CREDIBILITY AS LEADER OF THE PARTY, ACCORDINGLY, WAS FURTHER UNDERMINED. IT WAS ALSO A MAJOR DEFEAT FOR PARTY MODERATES WHO HAD WORKED TO LINE UP SUPPORT AGAINST BEVAN -- AS LATE AS THE EVENING OF DECEMBER 14 MODERATE SOURCES TOLD AN EMBOFF

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THAT THEY BELIEVED THEY HAD THE VOTES TO RESCIND BEVAN'S APPOINTMENT. POLITICALLY, THE NEC'S DECISION COMES AS A WINDFALL FOR THE CONSERVATIVES, WHO ARE BESET WITH INTERNAL DIFFERENCES OVER DEVOLUTION, AND WILL LEND CREDENCE TO THE MORE IRRESPONSIBLE TORY CHARGES OF EXTREMIST PENETRATION IN THE LABOR PARTY (REF. B). THE ONLY

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POSSIBLE POSITIVE EFFECT OF THE OUTCOME IS THAT IT MAY CAUSE THE MODERATES TO REDOUBLE THEIR EFFORTS TO REIN IN THE LEFT-WING. IN THE SHORT-TERM THIS MEANS TRYING TO SWITCH TWO OF THE UNION VOTES BEFORE THE JANUARY MEETING. KITSON AND WILLIAMS WOULD APPEAR TO OFFER THE BEST, BUT NOT VERY PROMISING, PROSPECTS, AS THE LEADERS OF THEIR UNIONS WOULD BE MOST OPEN TO CALLAGHAN'S PERSUASION. AS THE DELAY IN CONSIDERING THE UNDERHILL REPORT GIVES THEM MORE TIME, IT COULD BE FORTUNATE.

7. OVER THE LONGER-TERM, THE MODERATES CAN ONLY SUCCEED IF THEY CAN PERSUADE UNION LEADERS TO SHIFT THEIR SUPPORT AWAY FROM THE "HARD" LEFT-WINGERS REPRESENTING THE PARTY'S WOMEN'S SECTION -- HART, JEGAR, MAYNARD AND SHORT -- TO MODERATE CANDIDATES. AN EFFORT IN THIS DIRECTION WAS MOUNTED BEFORE THIS YEAR'S PARTY CONFERENCE CONFERENCE, BUT IT FAILED.

8. AS WE INDICATED IN REF. A, THE IMMEDIATE "MILITANT" THREAT TO THE LABOR PARTY IS NOT SERIOUS. BUT SHOULD THE NEC REFUSE TO ACT AT NEXT MONTH'S MEETING, PUBLIC
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PERCEPTION OF THE SITUATION IS ALMOST CERTAIN TO BE
BADLY DAMAGING, AND THE INTERNAL THREAT WILL BE ALLOWED
TO GO UNCHECKED. IN THE FUTURE, IT WILL BE MUCH HARDER
TO CONTAIN AND MORE TRAUMATIC TO REMOVE.

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